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BUILDING UP
THE MID-WEEK SERVICE

WILLIAM L. STIDGER, D.D.

By WILLIAM L. STIDGER

BUILDING UP THE MID-WEEK SERVICE
BUILDING SERMONS WITH SYMPHONIC
THEMES

FINDING GOD IN BOOKS
THAT GOD'S HOUSE MAY BE FILLED
HENRY FORD: THE MAN AND HIS
MOTIVES

ADVENTURES IN HUMANITY
THE PLACE OF BOOKS IN THE LIFE
WE LIVE

THERE ARE SERMONS IN BOOKS
FLASHLIGHTS FROM THE SEVEN SEAS
STANDING ROOM ONLY
SYMPHONIC SERMONS

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BUILDING UP THE MID-WEEK SERVICE

BY

WILLIAM L. STIDGER, D.D.



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BUILDING UP THE MID-WEEK SERVICE
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JACK MEREDITH

*My Associate Pastor in two Churches where we
have worked out the ideas set forth in this book*

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JUST A WORD TO THE PREACHERS OF AMERICA:

What I want to say by way of introduction to this little book about the modern mid-week meeting is that I believe the Wednesday Service can be made the greatest service of the week in our churches if we take it seriously enough.

I am convinced that the old type of Prayer Meeting is through, except in very isolated instances. We are in the midst of a new day and we must evolve a new way.

You know and I know that the heart-break of the average preacher's life is the so-called Prayer Meeting; the mid-week service. I suffered myself in trying to make it go in the old way. Then I decided to break loose from old traditions and try to build a service to fit the psychology, and the thinking and feeling of the new day.

In two churches I failed miserably with my mid-week meetings; and in two churches I

have succeeded with this mid-week meeting. In St. Marks I had a chance to break away from the past and we built up a Prayer Meeting until it had an average attendance of 500. That has continued to grow until it is larger now, since I left that church, than it was when I was there, so that is evidence that the institution which I established did not depend upon my personality to make it go. It was the method which carried the power. In my present church, during my first year we have built up a Prayer Hour, which we call the Sanctuary Service, until it has had, many times during the first year, an attendance of 1,000 people. When my preacher readers know that this church held its Prayer Meeting in one of the smallest rooms in the church with an average attendance of about twenty, with now and then fifty present on a special occasion, they will understand that a jump from even fifty to 1,000 is a proof that the methods which I set forth in this book will work. They are pragmatic. They will work in any type of a church, large or small; in village or town or city.

The urge to write this book has been coming

to me from various sources. I have hundreds of letters asking me to write a book on "The Church Night," or "The Family Night Meeting." These letters come nearly every week due to the fact that I am writing continuously for such preacher magazines as "Church Management," "The Homiletic Review," and "The Expositor."

I have among my friends the traveling salesmen for several large publishing houses who sell to the religious trade. These men, whenever I meet them and we talk books, say: "Why don't you write a book about your mid-week Prayer Meeting? We have constant demands for such a book."

Letters are constantly pouring into the religious book stores asking for such a book.

I have never written a book which I have enjoyed more than the one which follows this Introduction. It was written without interruption. This is the first book since "Soldier Silhouettes" which I have had the pleasure of writing in that fashion. It is a satisfaction to send forth a book when your heart is running over with its ideas and its mission. When one feels that he actually has something that

will be a help to other preachers there is joy in writing.

In that spirit I have set down the facts of this book. I do not care for it to have literary value. I do want it to have feeling as well as method. I believe that it has. My greatest reward will be the reward of knowing that it has helped preachers to break away from the old Prayer Meeting traditions into a new and a living Sanctuary Service. That service will lose none of its spiritual values, I hope. Indeed it ought to be even more intensely full of the spirit of prayer than the old type of a Prayer Meeting. It will have young and old present.

My conviction is that, if for no other reason than that it did not attract the young people, the so-called old-fashioned Prayer Meeting was long ago doomed to die. It was essentially selfish.

This new Sanctuary Service may become intensely spiritual and immensely practical. It is groomed to meet a need of to-day. It will meet that need, as is evidenced by the fact that everywhere it is being tried it is doubling, and tripling, the attendance. I have hundreds of letters from preachers who have re-made

their mid-week meetings over these patterns, until they are holding their Sanctuary Services in the main auditorium of their churches instead of in the smallest rooms in these churches.

BUILDING UP
THE MID-WEEK SERVICE

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CHAPTER I

A New Way for the New Day

I grew up on the old-time Prayer Meeting. I revere its memory.

I also attended old-fashioned Class Meetings. In addition to my boyhood experiences in such meetings I have had them in my churches as a pastor. I was converted in an old-fashioned Revival Meeting.

Therefore, I believe that I write with as much reverence as any human being can of those other days and other ways. I have a full appreciation of their value. But their value was to another day and another generation. That day is gone and so have all three of these church institutions: The Class Meet-

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ing, the Prayer Meeting, and the Revival Services as they were conducted in my boyhood.

However they are not gone entirely. Psychological children of these three great church institutions are still with us. We have these three functions of the church, only they are taking different forms now.

The old way will not work for the new day so we have evolved ways that will work.

The Prayer Meeting Problem is the most acute problem that a modern preacher faces. He has a profound feeling that there ought to be some kind of a religious service in the interval of the long stretch of seven days between Sundays, but he has learned through bitter experience that people will not attend the old-fashioned Prayer Meeting.

The real truth of the matter, if that is any comfort to the minister, is that they did not attend this same Prayer Meeting in the old days either. At least no children or young people attended. They were appalled by that meeting.

Evidence that the church world is greatly concerned about this mid-week meeting is pro-

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duced in the many books which are written under such headings as "The Problem of the Prayer Meeting," "What to Do About the Wednesday Night Service," "Why Our Prayer Meetings Fail," and "Is There Any Hope for Our Mid-Week Prayer Meeting?"

These questions have been raised and answered in many books and almost innumerable articles in our church papers.

If all the editorials and special articles which have appeared in church publications on this particular problem since I entered the ministry were laid end to end, I verily believe that they would reach around the earth.

There has been a general admission on the part of the church world that the mid-week Prayer Meeting, as it has been conducted in the last twenty-five years, is not pragmatic. It will not work. It does not reach the people. It does not attract them. It does not even make any claims to attracting children or the young people of a church or of a community.

Many of us remember the old-fashioned Prayer Meeting. To us, at that time, it was dull and monotonous. A small group of the old faithfuls were there. They sat in the same

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seats, they sang the same hymns, they offered the same prayers, they gave the same testimonies, year in and year out. Now and then a young person was dragged to one of these meetings by an elder. That experience was one of unholy merriment, especially if a fellow-victim of like age was present. Otherwise it was an hour of drab monotony, spent in listening to testimonies that one had listened to from childhood, and which one could repeat word for word.

This old-time Prayer Meeting was not taken very seriously by either the church at large or the preacher himself. There were exceptions of course. I can remember some. But on the whole for twenty-five years this institution has languished and even the preachers have felt that it was a weak survival.

When the preacher went to the mid-week meeting he usually met half a dozen old men and women who attended through a sense of habit, duty, and a general lack of desire to do anything else. He patiently listened to their complaints and to their hackneyed testimonies. He too could repeat both word for word.

The history of this so called old-fashioned

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Prayer Meeting runs back to the Wesleys. That is the chief reason for a change. Nothing else in church forms and customs that dates back that far survives.

Who has not heard the preacher announce, with a listless voice: "The usual mid-week Prayer Meeting will be held Wednesday evening in the Primary Room. I hope everybody will feel that this meeting is worthy of support and be there."

It is a lifeless announcement. He knows that very few will be there. He knows that none of his young people will be there. He knows also that few of his Official Board will be there. He really doesn't want to go himself.

Wednesday evening comes along and at seven-thirty the preacher appears. There are a few old-timers in the meeting, scattered about the room. The preacher says, "We seem to be late in gathering this evening." He talks as if that is an unusual thing. But he himself has made that same opening remark for years. He doesn't expect much from that meeting and he will not be disappointed. His opening sentence is a psychological admission of defeat. Then he continues, "So we'll sing a few of the old

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hymns until a few more gather for the meeting. What shall we sing?"

The preacher has not selected any hymns in advance, so there is a desperately deadly pause between each selection. The sleepy and aged attendants don't want to be disturbed. Why didn't the minister select the hymns? Now and then a number is yawned out. It is usually a number which has been sung to death in countless Prayer Meetings all in a row.

A tedious fifteen minutes is wasted in listless singing without an organist. The organist is not there. She never is. Somebody in the front row volunteers to play. There is always somebody who will volunteer to play. There is also always somebody who will volunteer to say a piece at a party.

The preacher speaks again: "Our usual organist is not here, but Sister Michaeljohn has offered to play for us." He groans under his breath.

No further attendants appear and finally the poor parson scowls and in mid-week desperation makes some cheerful remark about how poorly the people of that church are supporting the Prayer Meeting, and that if they don't want to

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have a Prayer Meeting, why not discontinue it entirely rather than make a weekly farce of it?

Then there is the usual reading of the Scripture Lesson.

Another hymn is announced. It is droned out; sometimes with an organist, and sometimes without one. There never seemed to be any regular organist at this meeting.

"We will now have a group of Sentence Prayers!" announces the preacher. He emphasizes that word "Sentence" with considerable vehemence. He doesn't exactly like to mention names but there are one or two individuals in that room at whom that emphasis is launched. Everybody knows who they are. They never offered sentence prayers in all their lives and the preacher knows they won't do so this evening.

Then come the "Sentence Prayers." They are from five to ten minutes in length and they seem much longer. Everybody else in that room knows every sentence, every intonation of each of these prayers.

I used to hear one such prayer which always ended up in this grand and glorious climax, every word of which I can set down from mem-

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ory because I heard it every Wednesday night for years: "Oh, Lord, let me so live that, when I am done with this earthly turmoil and trouble, and I have mounted up the Heavenly Jacob's Ladder on Eagle Wings, and have entered into the Golden Gate and stand in Thy Divine Presence, that I shall hear myself say, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee steward over many!'"

This will not sound like an exaggeration to hundreds of preachers who have heard such testimonies. I certainly do not intend it for a caricature. It is an honest reproduction of a testimony which I heard for years as a boy, and which I could easily repeat from its beginning to its lengthy end, word for word.

Another old brother in our church to whom I used to listen as a boy always talked about his "Wonderful Kissperience with God."

Then came the announcements. After that the preacher spoke. That was the brightest thing in the meeting, although even that was not up to his Sunday standard and he didn't offer it as such and nobody expected it to be as well prepared, nor as seriously taken. No wonder.

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There was nobody there and no inspiration for the preacher to make a serious effort.

To-day it is all different. In our modern mid-week meeting the preacher prepares as carefully as he does for either of his Sunday services. To his way of thinking that mid-week service is the most important service of all the week. The children are there, the young people crowd the auditorium. There is an air of expectation in the "Church Night." Everybody from the preacher down expects a fine time and they have it. It is an inspiration to the preacher to have a great crowd at his mid-week "Family Night Service" and he prepares as carefully as if he was making his Sunday morning sermon.

Then comes, in that old-fashioned Prayer Meeting, the closing prayer. Brother Jenkins, the official Prayer of the meeting, was always expected to be asked to lead in the "Closing Prayer." I can actually remember when a new preacher came to town one time, and was not warned that it was Brother Jenkins' prerogative to make that closing prayer. Of course Brother Jenkins was not called on. As a boy, I almost laughed out loud at that omission. I knew the preacher was in for it. He had uncon-

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sciously and innocently omitted a closing ritual for that Prayer Meeting which had been in force for years, farther back than I could remember.

But it was no laughing matter for the preacher. He found out immediately at the close of that Prayer Meeting, when several irate worshipers of God, including Brother Jenkins himself, informed him of his mistake. You would have thought that the preacher had deliberately, with forethought, design, and premeditation, offered an insult to Brother Jenkins and his dignity as a Christian. It was the talk of the town for weeks. It took that preacher a long time to recover from that bad start.

No doubt, a long time ago, the Prayer Meeting type which I describe had its place and its purpose. It may have been a healthy and helpful church institution. It may have been crowded with people. It may have been alert and alive. But not within the memory of the present generation of preachers.

In the pioneer days of our mothers and fathers it may have had its place and its power, but for twenty-five years it has been one of the dying remnants of an old and glorious day.

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The automobile, the radio, the motion-picture have all come to challenge us. The youth of this day cannot be interested in such a meeting. The name itself is forbidding. Indeed I doubt if ever there was a time when that type of a mid-week meeting interested the young. That in itself is an indictment against such a meeting.

I am one who firmly believes in a mid-week meeting and I want it to be, and I believe that it can be, a deeply spiritual hour. I know that the world needs such a spiritual hour in mid-week; that from Sunday to Sunday is too long a space to go without this renewal of our spiritual lives. Neither am I one who believes that a supper, a banquet or a little polite Open Forum on Current Events will suffice to feed the needy souls of men and women.

I still believe that this mid-week meeting must be a great, deep and flowing stream of spiritual power, so that men, and women, and children will be eager to attend this meeting; and so that, when they do come, they will find refreshments for their spiritual selves.

This modern mid-week meeting for the new day must have even more spiritual power and atmosphere than its forerunner, the old-fash-

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ioned Prayer Meeting. It is entirely possible for it to have.

I have known both, as I have suggested, and, I will wager my life that the modern mid-week meeting when properly conducted is fifty per cent more sensibly spiritual than the old type of meeting. Godly men conducted these old-time meetings and I revere their memories. But they had gotten into terrible ruts themselves and they had permitted this Wednesday night meeting to do the same thing.

No preacher seemed to care or to dare to touch the sacred ritual of that old Prayer Meeting. If he did he was not "Preaching the Gospel."

But men of recent years have dared, in their desperation, and in the name of God; and for the sake of saving a sacred hour; and for the sake of the souls of humanity, to break new trails.

And they have gloriously succeeded. The mid-week meeting is now an institution that works. It attracts both young and old. It is a beautiful Family Night. It is rich in spiritual power. It is a place for laughter and play; for love and friendship. It is the meeting place of

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Father and Son, Mother and Daughter ; lad and lass. Lovers find each other here. They eat together. They sing together. They pray together.

If, for no other reason than that the modern Prayer Hour interests and holds the young, it is superior to the old-time mid-week meeting. The children and the young have a place in the modern meeting, and they did not have a place in the old-time meeting.

It is of such a meeting that I write in the following chapters of this book. I talk with reverence and devotion. I talk with the authority of a man who confesses to failing in building a Prayer Meeting in two churches. In Calvary and First Church, San Jose, California, my Prayer Meetings were dismal failures. I am ashamed of them. But I also talk with the authority of a man who has built two modern mid-week services which are among the most successful in America. I talk in this book with reverence but with confidence.

In the next chapter of this book I shall speak of the value of a new name for this mid-week meeting. It is important that it be given a new name.

CHAPTER II

Let Us Give It a New Name

In one of Dan Crawford's ever stimulating and suggestive books he tells of an African custom that fits the spirit of this chapter.

An African boy does not go to the end of his days with the name that was given him at his birth. He changes names from time to time as some new achievement comes to him. If he kills an elephant, or does a brave deed, he changes names. As he grows in stature his name changes. The name indicates the changes that appear in his developing life.

From time to time every growing thing ought to be given a new name. The old name does not fit the new institution. Particularly is this true of the mid-week devotional and prayer hour. It is handicapped by the old name of Prayer Meeting. That has the atmosphere of another day and another way about it. The mid-week service of to-day is nothing like the mid-week

service of the day when it was called a "Prayer Meeting." It is a prayer meeting but it ought to be much more than that.

If we write a book or an article for a magazine and the name does not cover what is in that book or that article the Editor is very apt to feel that we are careless, or that we lack imagination, and he is apt to be greatly prejudiced against that manuscript. The name itself also has a lot to do with attracting his attention before he has even read the manuscript.

A classic illustration of that is the story that Ellis Parker Butler sent in his famous story "Pigs is Pigs" under the title of "An Example in Multiplication." The Editor gave the story its real name, and that name has gone around the earth.

Let us give the new mid-week service a new name. Let us rechristen it. Let that name stand for the spirit of the new devotional hour. Let the name encompass the meaning, the spirit, and the program of that meeting.

If for no other reason, let us give this hour a new name for the sake of variety. Let us give it a name that will have something of newness about it. We are no longer living in a

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Horse and Buggy Age. We are living in an automobile age now. The name "Prayer Meeting" suggests to the young people of to-day a "Horse and Buggy Age." I do not say this with disrespect, but with a heart alert to the thoughts that are singing through the mind of Youth.

Several names for this mid-week service have been suggested and are in general and popular use. I cannot see that this change of names has injured the sacredness of the mid-week meeting in any way. On the other hand, I can see that it has helped a lot. The name "Prayer Meeting" is forbidding to this day and age.

Praying in public seems to this age an unwarranted display of sacred things. It seems to the psychology of this age to be in the same class of public demonstrations as making love to one's wife in a public place; or talking over one's innermost secrets in a public place, rather than in the sacred secrecy of one's closet and of one's own home, where such matters should be talked.

One of the names which has been generally adopted is that of "Family Night." Personally I greatly like this name for it suggests the very

thing for which this mid-week meeting ought to stand, and the very thing that it ought to do for the members of any church.

This mid-week service ought to be the great gathering together of the church membership in fellowship and friendliness. The Sunday services are necessarily formal, and more public in their nature. The church membership does not really get acquainted with itself within the church family. This is one of the great needs of the average church: to have fellowship like a great family within its own groups. That was the identical spirit of the early church in the days of the Roman persecutions. The church was like a great family. They met together in the closest of family-fellowship.

The mid-week meeting ought in some way to develop that family spirit and it ought to make every member of that great church family feel that this meeting is for each individual. That is the genius of the new type of meeting.

Every group in the church, from the youngest to the oldest, should have a distinct place in this meeting. Every baby should look forward to that hour.

It will build up memories in the life of a little

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baby that will never die. Just a few days before writing this chapter a father in my church told me that in just such a prayer hour in the midst of my sermon little Jane Kirkpatrick, in her mother's arms, looked up and said suddenly, "Dr. Stidger is talking about Jesus again, isn't he, Mother?"

That child is not yet three years old. Every child of the church ought to feel that this Wednesday night meeting has a place for it.

In chapter ten of this book I shall tell how we have worked out the first "Graded Prayer Hour" in America and how successfully it worked during my five years' ministry at St. Marks Methodist Church in Detroit, and how successfully it is still working; and will work in every church if the preacher desires to work it.

I like this name "The Family Night."

It not only gives the membership a chance to meet together as a great family but it also gives each separate family a chance to meet together outside of its home, under the auspices of the church. That also is valuable to every unit-home. It is a beautiful thing for the father to come from his office or his work and meet

his family at the church on Wednesday evenings for supper. There ought to be unit tables; round tables; so that Family Groups may meet together.

You say that they meet and eat together at home? They do not. That is one of the curses of this modern way of living. Seldom do entire families meet and eat together even in their own homes.

Let the church provide them this opportunity and the church is rendering a spiritual service that will be eternally blessed to any home. I advocate circular small tables for the mid-week supper for this single and simple reason.

In St. Marks we had circular tables and would have nothing else. They take up more room, but they give opportunities for families to get together and sit together. This is invaluable.

These circular tables also give teachers a chance to meet with their classes for that mid-week meal. They also give committees a chance to meet together for that mid-week meal. It is one of the best ways to teach a church to center its committee and class meetings on one night. It is the greatest centralizing force that I have ever seen at work.

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Before the church knows it, the members have gotten into the good habit of saying, when there is to be a committee meeting, "Oh, let's have our committee meeting on Wednesday night at the supper. I'll reserve a table for us. That will save us all an evening, and we'll all be there anyhow."

That is exactly the habit which develops when this mid-week service is working at its best. It centralizes the mid-week activities in one big friendly "Family Night."

One of the almost priceless values of this "Family Night" is that it gives the preacher a chance to meet his people face to face, to chat with them; truly to get personally acquainted with them. I have found it invaluable. I always plan to be in the church when the first people begin to arrive for the supper and every Wednesday evening I personally shake hands with every person who comes. That means an average of five hundred people before the evening is through in my present church although we frequently have a thousand people attending our mid-week meeting at Linwood Methodist Church in Kansas City. On Sundays the preacher, like the people, is more or less host

to the outsiders who attend the church services. He does not have a chance to shake hands with all. He is on his dignity that day if he has any. At least it is a more or less formal day all around. But on this Wednesday evening if the "Family Spirit" prevails he has his real opportunity of all the week to get wonderfully close to each one of his people.

Another name which we used at St. Marks has found popularity all over the United States and the British Empire in church circles. I originated that name at St. Marks in order to designate in popular language the three-fold meaning of our particular kind of a mid-week Family Night Service. I called it the "Food, Faith and Fun Night." I shall discuss in detail the features of the type of a meeting which brought upon itself this name. That discussion will come in chapter nine.

However I may say briefly here that the name covered the three-fold periods of our mid-week meeting: First, the Supper which ran from six to seven (the "Food" part). Second: The various Prayer Groups (the "Faith" part). Third: The Motion Pictures, Organized Play, etc. (the "Fun" part).

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This name, "The Food, Faith and Fun Night," is being used in hundreds of churches in the United States, several in Great Britain, according to letters and newspaper clippings which have come to me from time to time during the last five years.

Some of my preacher friends have given the name a new twist by making it "The Food, Faith and Frolic Night," or "The Food, Faith and Friendship Night," or "The Food, Faith and Fellowship Night." I sometimes think that I like some of the adaptations of my original name better than I like my own selection itself.

Which leads me to say this: In preacher groups and gatherings I often have a man say: "Yes, that is all right for YOU to say that such and such a method will work. Maybe it will for you. But can we do it?"

My answer always is: "My methods are merely vehicles. Anybody can use them just as anybody can drive a Ford or a Lincoln car. Mr. Ford makes them both, but it does not require a Ford personality to drive in either. Each man drives a Ford or a Lincoln according to his own lights, his own ways of doing things in general. My methods are merely vehicles. Each man

may use them according to his own individuality. I claim that they are workable; that anybody can work them; just as anybody can learn to drive either a Ford or a Lincoln car. We all drive cars differently. Even my wife can tell when I have been driving the car. She feels that something serious has happened to it; that the gears are all shot to pieces, that the steering wheel has been jerked rather ruthlessly, that the tires are flatter than usual, that the oil and gas and water have been allowed to run disastrously low; that the water in the batteries has entirely evaporated.

We drive the same car, but, according to all that I hear after I have been driving it, we drive it differently, and all the destructive things that happen with that vehicle happen when I am driving it, or when she is driving it because of something that I have left undone when I was driving it.

An illustration of what I mean is continually coming to me. A man up in Maine, or a man out in California, or one down in Texas, who has been using my vehicles, writes and gives me a brilliant adaptation of one of my methods which I never thought of and which always

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pleases me greatly. The new names which have been evolved over my original name of "Food, Faith and Fun Night" have been better names than mine. This is due to having other minds at work on an idea. I like the "Food, Faith and Fellowship Night" name the best of all, because that implies "Fellowship" with each other, with the preacher and with God. The name "Fun" which we first thought of is crude compared with the name "Fellowship."

Every constituency must produce different problems. Different types of people make it necessary that a preacher use his ingenuity and produce both new methods and new names. I have never used the same methods entirely in any church that I have had. I find it necessary to produce new methods for new groups. Each church which I have served has compelled me to evolve new methods.

For instance, in the matter under discussion in this chapter, I have evolved for the name of our Mid-Week Meeting "The Sanctuary Service." We do not have a fine community house in which to play and run motion pictures in Linwood Boulevard Methodist Church, although we shall have in a short time. Therefore the

type of a mid-week service which I ran in St. Marks could not be exactly the type that I run here. It is a different type of an auditorium—finished in beautiful walnut, stately, dignified, and the same things that fitted into St. Marks white, unpainted walls, covered with dirty hand-marks, democratic, without a single touch of the churchly feeling, would not fit in here.

I saw at once that I must evolve a new name for my mid-week meeting here and in a few days "The Sanctuary Service" came to me and it seems to fit my mid-week meeting here perfectly.

Let us not call it a "Prayer Meeting." Let us give our mid-week meeting a new name. As the idea of the mid-week meeting grows and changes, why should we keep the same name with all of its suggestions of that dull, monotonous and deadly hour which childhood remembers out of the past? Let us give the mid-week meeting a new name so that that new name will suggest something attractive and alluring to young people and to children; for every age ought to be and will be in the mid-week meeting, if we plan properly for it.

In the next chapter I am going to discuss the

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matter of just how important it is for preachers to take this mid-week meeting seriously and how pragmatic it will be when the preacher expects great things from it.

CHAPTER III

Let Us Expect Much from That Sanctuary Service

Last summer I was looking over Linwood Boulevard Methodist Church, the outstanding church of its denomination in the middle west, and one of the truly great churches of the United States of America.

But like most churches its Prayer Meeting had died out.

They were holding it in the Ladies' Room, a small room in a rather dark corner of this beautiful church. That room, all told, would seat about fifty when it was full, but on Prayer Meeting night for years it had averaged about fifteen in attendance in a church which had a membership of close to two thousand.

When we came to this small room the fine gentleman who was showing me over the church, and who was trying to make as profound an impression on my youthful mind as possible, with

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the evil intention of inveigling me into becoming the pastor of the church, said, "This is our Prayer Meeting Room."

"What? Do you hold your Prayer Meeting in a room like this?" said I, trying to look as astonished and as disappointed as I could, although I knew that that was exactly what I would discover, sooner or later. I myself had had a great Prayer Meeting of 500 at St. Marks for years. However, I had too much sense to expect to inherit this kind of a meeting in many churches. Ninety-nine out of a hundred would have handed down to me just that same message; the message that the business man handed down to me that June afternoon.

"Well, when I get here you'll hold your Prayer Meeting in the main auditorium of the church and there will be enough people want to come to Prayer Meeting to fill it in a short time. Do you ever come to Prayer Meeting?"

He was the manager of one of the largest business organizations in America and, of course, I knew that he hadn't been coming to Prayer Meeting. I would have doubted his intelligence if he had been coming. But I pretended that I was greatly chagrined and sur-

prised that he had not been attending Prayer Meeting regularly. I knew that if I did not accept that church my attitude would not hurt him any and might make him think; and if I did accept that church I could make a Prayer Meeting worth his attending.

He answered my question in the negative. I said, "Well, you will attend Prayer Meeting when I come as your Pastor for it will meet a need in your life that will be met no place else in this city, and it will be so interesting that you will not want to stay away. We'll start right off with the Prayer Meeting in the main auditorium."

It was at that juncture that I could see that he began to doubt my sanity. I think that he wondered, after all, if they really wanted me as their pastor. I seemed all right in all other respects except that talk about holding a Prayer Meeting in the main auditorium, and about having four or five hundred attend that Prayer Meeting in a church when fifty had been a mob. I could see a funny look in his usually bright eyes. He looked like a man who had received a great and serious disillusionment. He had built up great hopes on a young man's integrity and

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here he was the first thing talking such nonsense as five hundred at Prayer Meeting.

He has since admitted to me that he thought that my enthusiasm was overstepping the bounds of possibility a little that afternoon. He thought that maybe the Kansas heat had overbalanced me a little since I had been used to the cool breezes from Lake Erie.

I arrived in Kansas City as per schedule about the middle of September, and began preaching in an auditorium fairly well filled in spite of an extremely hot wave of weather. At the Sunday morning service I was just foolish enough to announce that the auditorium would be used from henceforth and forever as a Prayer Meeting Room.

"We'll need the auditorium because that is the only room in the church plant large enough to hold the people who will want to be there. We will start off our Fall Prayer Meetings with about five hundred in attendance, and that crowd will gradually grow to a thousand each week in attendance at our mid-week meeting. This meeting will be called a Sanctuary Service. The first sermon preached will be the sermon

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selected by Dr. J. Fort Newton as one of the 'Best Sermons of 1925.'

"I am preaching this particular sermon because I want to show you that I consider these Wednesday evening services the most important services in the church, even more important than either of the Sunday services. I am, therefore, selecting what one great preacher has called my best sermon preached last year. I do not say that it is my best sermon. I do not even say that it is a great sermon. I simply say that I am going to preach the sermon that Dr. Newton calls a worth-while sermon. If I consider that first Prayer Meeting, or Sanctuary Service, important enough to expect half a thousand people there, and important enough to preach my best sermon before, I think there will be a real necessity of holding the Prayer Hour in this church auditorium."

There were five hundred people in attendance that first Prayer Meeting. I had great expectations and the people caught the contagion. I had more people at that Prayer Meeting and have continued to have, than had been attending both Sunday services combined for years. This

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is no reflection on anybody. I am simply writing a book on Prayer Meetings and am trying to show that, when you expect great things and prepare for great things, and consider this hour important enough to prepare for carefully, the people will come.

This Prayer Meeting—to be generous in my figures—has jumped from fifty in attendance to an average of 500 in three months. It has been a thousand in attendance for the last three weeks preceding the writing of this chapter, and I have just been approached about broadcasting this Prayer Hour. If I do it will be one of the first broadcastings of a Prayer Meeting in the United States of America.

But it has not always been thus with my Prayer Meetings.

In fact I have had two mid-week services in two churches which were, to my way of thinking, abject and humiliating failures. It was because I was working on the old lines. I was trying to do the same thing that the preachers and the churches of my boyhood days had done for centuries unnumbered. I was trying to carry out the old program in the old way. The fact of the matter is that I did not know any

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better. I was to have to learn by bitter experience. I had not been taught anything different in the colleges or Theological Seminaries. I doubt if there is any Theological School in America even to-day which really teaches a preacher how to run a modern mid-week meeting successfully. There is very little taught in the average Seminary that is of much practical benefit to a preacher when he actually gets out into life.

Therefore for two pastorates—those of Calvary, San Francisco, and San Jose, California—I tried to run the usual type of a Prayer Meeting.

The average attendance at Calvary was about five. The average at San Jose was about thirty. The usual old faithfuls were there; the usual deadly and monotonous testimonies, prayers, and songs were sung. No young people attended except by accident. I did not expect them to attend. I had not, as yet, caught the vision of a mid-week service for young as well as old. I was restless under this type of a Prayer Meeting. I knew that something was wrong with it, just as every preacher has felt. I knew that there ought

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to be a way to interest young people as well as adults in that mid-week meeting.

However, I allowed the benumbing influence of tradition to creep over me in relation to this mid-week service. I broke loose in every other department of church life and did unique and original and successful things. I had my first great overflow crowds. I took more than three hundred people into the church my first year as its pastor. Everything was booming but the Prayer Meeting.

I just settled down into contentment, saying to myself by way of easing my ministerial conscience, "Oh, well, the Prayer Meeting is a dead institution, so why should I worry about it? I'll just let these old people who enjoy it drop in—and do what they please."

I didn't expect much from it and nothing much ever came of it. Now, the pastor who is there, modeling his mid-week meetings much along the lines of a modern Family Night, has great and thriving Prayer Meetings, with an educational program and great crowds, preceded by a dinner.

However I did have this awakening. I promised myself that the next church I had I

would break away from traditions in that mid-week meeting, just as I had in everything else and I would experiment until I actually had solved that Prayer Meeting Problem which was bothering all ministers.

The rest of this book will deal, in its various chapters, with the different steps and phases of the development of that dream, and the processes of that breaking away from traditions in the mid-week meeting.

I feel that I speak with the authority of the fact that the Prayer Meetings at St. Marks have increased in attendance and success, under the ministrations of Dr. James Thomas, rather than diminished. That means that the system works and that I built well. It means that these methods are not peculiar to my own ways of doing things as many ministers say. It means that it is the system which works and that any man and every man can work the system after his own ideas and his own personality, as I have said in a previous chapter.

Dr. Thomas does not run these mid-week meetings exactly as I did but the same machinery, the same system, the same vehicle he uses in his own way. His mid-week meetings

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are much larger than mine were and it has become necessary there to hold them in the main auditorium of the church where the great new pipe organ is available.

When I contrast my experiences at San Francisco and San Jose with my experiences at Detroit and in Kansas City I know that the chief reason for my failure was my unwillingness or my fear of breaking away from the traditional type of Prayer Meeting; and the chief reason for my success in the last two churches that I have served was because I broke away from tradition and pioneered a new way for the new day in the mid-week meeting.

In the next chapter I shall discuss a new way of praying, which gives everybody a chance to pray, and which violates no timid soul, and embarrasses no child or adult; a way which is just as reverent and even more spiritual than the old system.

To my way of thinking this new way of praying is the very heart of the new type of a Prayer Meeting which we call "The Sanctuary Service."

CHAPTER IV

The New Way of Praying Through the Great Hymns

Prayer is not easy for everybody.

Public prayer is almost impossible for most human beings.

In the old day it was the common custom for the preacher or the leader to insist upon public prayer being made by persons to whom it was a great embarrassment and humiliation.

Most of us can remember when the preacher or leader used to go up and down a row of embarrassed people and say, "Now you stand up and tell us what the Lord has done for you!" Generally we were too scared to refuse and too nervous to know what we were talking about when we got up.

There may have been those who thought that was a good thing but no Psychologist would say it was.

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The truth of the matter is that only a very few people are trained to speak with any intelligence or with any ease on their feet and the general mass of people are frightened, humiliated, and injured when they are forced, through any show of hands, or being put in a corner, to make a public demonstration of such a sacred matter as talking with their God about their private spiritual affairs.

The old day is past when this can be done and thank God that it is past. The way to testify for God is to live for Him and work for Him, and give for Him; and that is a greater testimony than getting up in a Prayer Meeting, frightened to death, and saying what you are expected to say.

In the nature of the case only a very small proportion of such testimonies or prayers could be sincere and honest. One was expected to say certain things and one did.

The new day must have a new way of giving people an opportunity of expressing their spiritual joys and emotions. Just as the old days when a fervent "Amen" was shouted from the public audience are past, so is the old way of the public testimony and prayer gone.

What shall we do about it?

We shall meet the new day with a new way.

We shall meet it with a way that is suited to its psychology and its mass-spirit. We shall give the new mind a chance to pray democratically.

How?

Through the great hymns!

For six years we have been praying through the great hymns of the church. We select such a hymn as "Just for To-day."

I say to my great audience of people gathered in a Prayer Hour:

"It is hard for most of you to pray in public. You are timid. You find yourself so frightened that you do not get anything spiritual out of it when you do muster up courage enough to do it. I am going to give you a way of praying that you can do easily, without embarrassment and that will bring to you a better spiritual reaction than even the old way of praying publicly.

"We are going to sing a great and beautiful Prayer-Hymn. It was originally written as a prayer. It has the phraseology of prayer in every line. It has the spiritual pulse of prayer

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in it. If you will sing it as a great prayer it will be such to you. That will give every person in this great crowd an opportunity to pray. In the old way, in a large crowd like this, only a few persons could pray at most. Through this Prayer-Hymn everybody in this room can truly pray if he will.

“Let us sing the first verse of this Prayer-Hymn in full voice:

“ ‘Lord, for to-morrow and its needs, I do not
pray;

Keep me, my God, from stain of sin, just for
to-day.

Help me to labor earnestly and duly pray;

Let me be kind in word and deed, Father,
to-day!’

“Then we shall sing the second verse of this great Prayer-Hymn softly—making it a prayer as we sing, for it is truly that:

“ ‘Let me no wrong, or idle word, unthinking,
say;

Set Thou a seal upon my lips through all
to-day!

Let me in season, Lord, be grave, in season,
pray;

Let me be faithful to Thy grace, dear Lord,
to-day!" "

May I interrupt the quotations to say that, by this time, my audience is in a beautiful mood of prayer; that it is singing softly those lines of fervent and practical prayer, put in phraseology which few people could command in extemporaneous prayer. The lines of poetry themselves have a profound, dramatic effect, and a spiritual reaction on all of those who are singing this prayer. Poetry is ever the language of the spiritual. Even the reading of beautiful poetry brings a spiritual reaction and the united singing of Prayer Poetry brings even a deeper spiritual value.

There is a tense atmosphere of prayer. The mood of the blessed Upper Room is on this great crowd of worshipers. It is always so. I have never known it to fail in six years of using this democratic system of prayer. Not a single time has it failed to produce a spiritual reaction in a Prayer Room and I am told by hundreds of individuals that this way of pray-

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ing is the most spiritual thing that happens in our Sanctuary Services.

I go on with the quotations and speak to my meeting again:

"The third verse we will hum. You close your eyes and hum this verse as a prayer and I shall read the lines softly to you and offer your prayer for you to God through that last beautiful verse. While I read the Prayer-Cross will be lighted and the rest of the lights in this auditorium will be turned off. You do not need to close your eyes unless you wish. Look into the face of this lighted cross, hum the lines of that beautiful prayer, and I shall read them." Then I touch a button beside the pulpit, the lights in the church go off; and a beautiful white Prayer-Cross goes on, gradually. The organist plays. The audience hums that last verse while I read it:

"And if to-day this life of mine shall ebb
away,

Give me Thy sacrament divine, Father,
to-day.

So, for to-morrow and its needs, I do not pray;
Still keep me, guide me, love me, Lord,
through each to-day!"

The audience has hummed this last prayer-verse as I have been reading it softly. The lighted cross has been shining into their faces.

There is a magic effect about the preacher reading that last verse while the audience hums it. I tried this over the Radio at one of our Vesper Services at Christmas time. I had my choir hum the last verse of "Silent Night, Holy Night" and I received hundreds of letters from all over the United States telling me how dramatic and magic the effect of that reading voice on that last verse was, with a background of humming.

Take such a beautiful old Prayer-Hymn as "I Need Thee Every Hour," and sing three verses of it in the way that I have suggested, giving your audience to understand that it is to be sung as a devout prayer. It was written as a great, throbbing, pulsing prayer and it is easy to sing it in that spirit. Its spiritual reactions on an audience will be immediate. Sing the first verse in full tone, the second softly and the last verse, hum. If there is a Prayer-Cross equipment in your Prayer Room use the Cross on that last verse. Let your Organist play the Vox Humani Stops, or the Chimes.

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"I need Thee every hour,
Most gracious Lord;
No tender voice like Thine
Can peace afford.

Chorus:

I need Thee,
Oh, I need Thee;
Every hour I need Thee!
Oh, bless me now, my Savior,
I come to Thee!"

(Second verse softly)

"I need Thee every hour,
Stay Thou near by;
Temptations lose their power
When Thou art nigh."

(Hum the last verse)

(Preacher reads it softly)

"I need Thee every hour,
Most Holy One;
Oh, make me Thine indeed,
Thou blessed Son!"

Any preacher with imagination, or even the slightest bit of spiritual feeling, can take a Prayer-Hymn like this and remake the spiritual atmosphere of his meeting any time. Such a hymn will do ten times more to produce a mood of real prayer than the most fervent prayer of the old time brother; either preacher or layman; who used to bring the very stars down as he slapped his thigh and yelled at the Lord.

The Hymn Book is full of Prayer-Hymns. Some of them are petitions, some are confessional, some are praise prayers. There are Prayer-Hymns to suit every mood and need and they ought to be used as prayers, for that was what they were written for.

This way of praying for the new day works. It fills a need of prayer which each soul has. It gives the audience and the individuals that make up that audience a sense of having prayed, a spiritual reaction, and a feeling of well-being; as those who have walked and talked with God.

I do not want to fill up this chapter with Prayer-Hymns, but I will suggest titles of a few Prayer-Hymns that we have used with magical results:

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- (1) "I Am Coming to the Cross."
- (2) "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross."
- (3) "Jesus, Lover of My Soul."
- (4) "Love Divine, All Love Excelling."
- (5) "More Love to Thee, O Lord!"
- (6) "Nearer, Still Nearer."
- (7) "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Me."
- (8) "I Am Thine, O Lord, I Have Heard
Thy Voice!"
- (9) "There is a Fountain."
- (10) "Just as I Am."
- (11) "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me."
- (12) "Abide with Me."
- (13) "Lead, Kindly Light!"
- (14) "Savior, Lead Me Lest I Stray!"
- (15) "My Jesus, I Love Thee!"
- (16) "Nearer, My God, to Thee!"
- (17) "Take My Life and Let It Be!"
- (18) "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross!"
- (19) "Sweet Hour of Prayer."
- (20) "I Must Tell Jesus."

I could go on indefinitely. I just set down these titles of the old and the more modern hymns which fill every type of a hymn book to show that there are innumerable Prayer-Hymns which may be used in this magic way.

The source is unfailing; the method is pragmatic; the spiritual reactions are a blessing to preacher, to each individual and to the audience as a whole!

As a preacher trying to meet modern problems and perplexities, trying to adopt my program to the usages, the customs, the language, and the psychology of the new day, I have never worked out a plan for prayer which is half so effective as this one is—year in and year out.

It meets a need. It gives a poor timid soul—and there are many of them—the chance to release those dammed up Prayer-Complexes which the modern Psychology is telling us about. This method releases emotional complexes which have had need of a source of expression for a long time. Therefore those who attend such a service have such a feeling of spiritual warmth and help that they want to come back. They do not always know just why, but they “Know What They Want” spiritually.

It is a democratic way of praying. It gives people a chance to pray in crowds, like they yell at ball games. People of this age are more gregarious than ever and they like to do things in mass.

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It releases Emotional Complexes for nervous people. It gives them about the only emotional release they have all week. I have seen men and women sitting before me, looking up into that white cross, humming the prayer of an old hymn, with the tears running over their cheeks. In fact this is a common experience every time we use this method.

In the next chapter I shall discuss the new type of testimony. In some way our modern Prayer Meeting must give those who attend and who desire, a chance for self-expression. Many will not wish this, but for those who do, a new way must be provided. People are not so glib as they used to be about publicly expressing their deeper spiritual emotions. It is not that they do not have them, because they do—more than ever human beings had them; but it is just that we are a little less eager to talk about our private affairs and our deeper feelings in a public place. I personally most heartily sympathize with this new shyness. I think that it is just as genuine for this day as the eagerness to expose one's spiritual state was in the older day and way.

CHAPTER V

The New Type of Personal Testimony

It is a good thing for a human being to have self-expression.

There was that much of value in the old-fashioned personal testimony.

Not every person could talk. Even if they did they did not want to talk about things so intimate as their spiritual status.

"I am living close to the Lord. I pray daily and fervently. I have lost my temper many times this week but the Lord has forgiven me for that." Thus ran the general tone of the old type of personal testimony. We all remember. It was generally the same thing over each week. I have no particular fault to find with a Christian who wants to tell, nor who did, in the old days tell, about his intimate spiritual condition. I used to do so myself when a boy in the old type of a Prayer Meeting.

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I have no objection to a person who likes that way of doing having a chance to talk even in the new Sanctuary Service. But what I do say is, that people of this day and age do not desire to do so. That does not necessarily mean that they do not have anything to think about. It does not mean that they are not deeply and reverently religious. It does not mean that they are any less devoted to Christ than our dear friends of another day, many of whom survive in our churches to-day; to deplore, rather critically, that the days of the "Old Gospel" are gone. They imply that the church, and the preachers, and the people of to-day have gone to the dogs spiritually.

They have a way of saying that a preacher who does not do things in the way they used to be done is not preaching "The Gospel." Most of the folks who offer this criticism do it in rather an unkindly and an un-Christian manner. Many of them are not far short of fault-finding in this type of criticism. In fact they are violating the very foremost tenets of Christ's teaching.

Christ had and taught a great reverence for the other person's opinion. He taught that

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there was nothing more sacred than Personality. That meant another person's opinions. That implied another generation's views. And yet the defenders of the old way of doing things do not hesitate to speak most bitterly of the generation that lives to-day and does not care to parade its show of piety before the throng; and therefore does not take to personal testimony readily.

Now, what "The Gospel" actually means is "The Good News." That is as fair a definition of it as can be given. Yet most of these people who criticize the present generation because it is not shouting from the housetops the spiritual condition of its soul, insinuate that this generation does not know what salvation, regeneration, and religion mean.

Having lived in both generations, and having been converted in an "Old-fashioned Revival Meeting"; and believing firmly in the reality of that experience; and having seen the results of both types of a Prayer Meeting, I sincerely believe that the present type of Family Night is more helpful, more deeply spiritual, and closer to practical Christian living and doing than the old type.

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The old type of a Christian meeting was made up largely of testimony which was continually alluding to what the "Lord has done for ME!" It was distinctly a selfish type of testimony. It was mostly talk about what to get and keep for one's self, with little thought of a religion that had to do with service to others.

A few days ago I was talking with Sinclair Lewis, author of "Main Street," "Babbitt" and "Arrowsmith," about the difference in the church of the old day and the church of this day. He is writing a book on the church. I told him that I felt that the difference consisted in this: In the old day the Christian was trying to get something for himself; in the new day he is trying to give something.

The difference is in getting and giving. In the old Prayer Meeting the testimony generally consisted of what God had given and done for the man making the testimony. The present spirit seems to be a testimony as to what God is helping us to do for somebody else.

As for me I believe that the latter day is better than the former.

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Religion of to-day is essentially a religion of service.

Religion of yesterday was essentially selfish.

Therefore the type of testimony, or self-expression, which fits in with the spirit of to-day in church work is one of action.

"Good news" is the theme of to-day's testimony. It is "The Gospel" just as it was before but it is the Gospel in action.

Therefore we have worked out a type of Testimony, or Self-Expression, in the modern Sanctuary Service which I call the "Gossip Period," or "Good News Period."

Churches have always suffered with a bad kind of Gossip. It has been the great temptation of the other type of church member, because he was essentially selfish in his religion. Every preacher will testify that Gossip; particularly in small-town churches has been vicious in church circles.

So in our modern type of a mid-week meeting we have tried to, and have succeeded in developing, a morale for a good kind of Gossip.

Gossip in its fundamental constituency is really Conversation. Conversation is good.

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Therefore let us have good conversation, and good gossip, and Good News; and let us drive out of the church the old petty, mean spirit of Gossip by developing a technique of good Gossip.

To that end in our "Good News Period" the church is trained to bring to that period all the good news it can find in the church, on the streets, in the papers. Cora Harris in one of her books tells about an idea she once had of editing a page for the newspaper which would be called "The Good News Page." She tried it out and it worked. It was so sensational that it boosted circulation. She searched out the husbands and wives who had lived together for fifty years and had raised large families and sent them out into the world; all as good citizens. She published the photographs of these old folks in the middle of that page and wrote a good story about them. That page got to be the most popular page in the newspaper. It worked because it was so rare to find "Good News" in the papers.

It will work in exactly that same way in the "Good News Period" of a mid-week meeting.

Mr. Jones has just heard a bit of good news

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about the church: "I was riding on a street car yesterday and I heard a couple of young people talking about our Sunday evening church service. They were planning to be here next Sunday evening because they had such inspirational times whenever they came that they said they would rather come here than go to a show."

Mrs. Johnson heard a neighbor woman say that her husband, who had not been in the habit of churchgoing for ten years, was coming regularly to this church now; wouldn't miss a Sunday evening service for anything.

Another man gets up and tells about a poor family that a certain class in the Sunday school helped and how grateful the family was.

Up jumps a little wiry man and says: "I never thought much of that testimony stuff they used to expect of us, but I'm glad to report that a fellow in the lobby of this church was so pleasant with me last Sunday morning and invited me to this Wednesday night meeting so cordially that I'm here and I've enjoyed it so much that I'm coming regularly, and I just thought this would fit in with your 'Good News' idea."

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And so it goes. Some person has heard Good News about the preacher, about his sermons, about the choir, about some solo. He has heard good news about a neighbor church. He has heard good news about some Missionary enterprise. He wants to tell it. He likes to tell it.

Another read a striking poem in the paper that helped him spiritually and he wanted to pass this "Good News" on to others so he reads the poem.

Another has read a good book which he wants others to know about so he passes the name of that good book on.

Every Wednesday evening will see this part of the service full to the limit of time. A great Chicago churchman visited our "mid-week" recently and said after it was over: "I liked that 'Good News' period because it popped every minute."

"It popped every minute" is a good description of such a meeting. There are no long-drawn-out, monotonous testimonies but "It pops every minute." That is the difference. One listens to these testimonies of service and his spiritual self is quickened. He goes out of

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that meeting on the alert for "Good News." He wants some "Gospel" to bring to the next one. There is seldom time for all who want to talk. There is a sense of alertness over the entire hour. That "Good News," or "Gossip" or "Gospel Period," is the most stimulating part of the entire service, although we seldom give more than ten to fifteen minutes for it in one of our Sanctuary Services.

This "Good News" period has a by-product that is most useful. The wise preacher will have a stenographer present or will himself jot down the more interesting human-interest things that are said and use them in his church bulletin the next Sunday.

A quickening element in a church bulletin is the human interest paragraph. It does not need to be a "personal item" like newspapers run, but an actual quotation from this "Good News" that comes on Wednesday evening in this open talk-fest.

We publish a bulletin that goes all over America in a paid subscription list of five hundred. It is full every week of human-interest paragraphs which I glean from this "Good News Period" in the Sanctuary Service. The

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people read it with great eagerness because of that human-interest material with which its pages throb every Sunday.

Personally I believe that this type of testimony is more vital and more deeply spiritual than the other kind and I have taken part in, and listened to, both kinds. I have been working this "Good News" in mid-week services for six years and it grows stronger, more practical, and more spiritual every week. It is a tried and tested method. I believe that it is the method for this day and for this generation.

The old day when a mid-week meeting was judged by how many testified and how many prayed is gone. It is not how many pray or how many testify that judges a good or a bad meeting to-day but it is what they say and what sort of a spiritual atmosphere and quickening that "Good News" produces in the hearts of men.

In the next chapter I shall briefly discuss the informality of this new type of a mid-week meeting; and how to produce it and still retain the spiritual values.

CHAPTER VI

Informality of the Mid-Week Meeting and How to Produce It

The Prayer Meeting of other days was formidable.

It was forbidding and children were awed by it. Young people were bored by it, and consequently did not attend unless they were forced to go.

Most American meetings of a secular sort in colleges, in high schools and elsewhere have a certain amount of democratic informality.

I believe that the mid-week meeting should be informal, without losing its spiritual dignity.

The two Sunday services are formal enough to serve that need of humanity. In fact my program has a place for only one formal, stately, dignified service and that is in the morning of a Sabbath Day. In the evening I have always made my service informal and popular, and I have always had great throngs

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at these Sunday evening services, also I have had more accessions to the church from this evening service than I have had from the more formal morning service.

This is due to the fact that, with the more popular and informal evening service, I have always reached the unchurched people. My appeals for Christ and the church, therefore, have fallen on ears that were in need of the church and out of the church. Those who attend the more formal morning services have always been the old and regular church members.

It is for this reason that I believe that the successful modern mid-week meeting must be informal.

To that end the first difference I make in the Sunday services and the mid-week service is to eliminate formal dress. I wear a business suit. I get closer to my people in this way. It is more of a "Family Night" when I dress in that manner. People feel more at home and so do I.

The second thing that we do to make the meeting informal is to have the preacher stand down on the main floor in front of the altar

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rather than in the pulpit. He thereby puts himself down on a level with his people. They like this feature. It makes this meeting different from both Sunday services and that is well. It makes it even more informal than the popular Sunday evening service, and that also is as it should be.

I have always stood before a small desk on the floor of the church auditorium throughout the entire service, never sitting down, always on my feet, always directing everything that goes on in that service; always keeping a hand on the emotional waves that throb through that sacred hour.

The third thing that I do to make this meeting informal is to have a "Billy Sunday Big Sing." I give it that name to make it sound informal. I select these hymns myself, and most carefully, before the service. I shall speak of this more in detail in the twelfth chapter of this book.

I never leave anything to chance in this meeting from beginning to end. I do not want anybody to feel that it has not been carefully and prayerfully planned for. I want it to be informal but not slipshod. I make just as careful

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preparation for the informality of this hour as I do for either Sunday service. That is where many of us preachers fall down into failure. We do not take this mid-week meeting seriously and neither does anybody else if we do not. I spend all of Wednesday morning planning every detail of this informal meeting.

I myself direct this "Big Sing." I have a piano and an organ, and sometimes a cornet in addition, to help me lead it. I also have from one to two song-leaders who actually stand up informally in front of the crowd and lead the singing, but I myself direct it, announce the hymns, tell that crowd how I want them to sing the hymns. I do that because I want a certain unified effect to be produced and everything must work to that end.

As I direct this "Big Sing" I walk down among the people; up one aisle and down another. I see a strange face here and one there. I shake hands if I can. I smile a greeting to those who are so far inside the seats that I cannot shake hands. I see a young man or a boy. I want him to know that I am especially aware of his presence and that I am glad he is there. I see a lonely face in that crowd and I shake

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hands with that man or woman. I may not even get a chance to talk, but a handclasp will tell a lot to a lonely man or woman. I walk up and down the aisle of my church while people are singing so that my going and coming will not attract a lot of attention. People like to get close up to a preacher if that preacher interests them at all.

I'm not much to look at but I like people. I have had hundreds say to me, "I like your going up and down the aisles of the church. Even if you don't speak to me; just a smile; just to know that you are passing by helps. I look forward to the moment in the service when you walk up and down."

I do not know that all preachers can do this. It must be done naturally or it will seem stilted, stiff, and melodramatic. But I offer it to those who can do it naturally as a good way to make a mid-week meeting informal, friendly, home-like, and heart-warming.

Joseph Parker said, "If I had my ministry to live over again I would preach more to broken hearts."

He was right. Every crowd has a good many broken hearts in it. We know of only a few of

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them. They come to a Sanctuary Service because they need help.

I was walking through my crowd this week—the week I write this chapter. I was reaching out here and there shaking hands. I came to one of my most prominent business men, a man of wealth and power in the community. I didn't think that he needed my poor feeble friendship very much and I was about to pass him by when I noticed a lonely, stricken look in his face. I reached out my hand, with that instinctive electrical outpouring of sympathy that we human beings may sometimes have. The tears came into his eyes. I said, "Stop and see me a minute after the meeting." He said, "I will, thank you!"

He came. I had not heard the dreadful news that his partner had that very afternoon committed suicide. He had been with that man for fifteen years and loved him like a brother. It meant a terrible upheaval in his business life. It had wrenched the very foundations of his life. I would likely not have caught that man in his most dreadful hour of need if I had not been walking down among my people. I would

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have heard in a day or two, but when he needed me was at that very hour.

Informality does not mean foolishness. A Sanctuary Service is no place for clownishness, nor for tricks. It is a deeply consecrated hour to do the weary souls of men and women good; to get them closer to God; to lift them out of their troubles and make them forget. It is an hour devoted to the sublime spiritual task of giving them new strength for the battle of life. It is a midway point between Sabbaths which all men and women need.

In the next chapter I want to talk about that special feature—service at least once each month to add variety to the mid-week meeting and to give your crowd a chance to hear an outside voice, preferably a preacher. This, to my way of thinking, is vitally important.

CHAPTER VII

Once a Month Feature Service for the Mid-Week Meeting

Once a month in this most successful mid-week service one ought to have an outside voice.

I try to bring the best preachers of America to my people.

It is possible to get them on Wednesday evenings but not on Sunday. A great preacher will not want to leave his church on the Sabbath but he will leave now and then on Wednesday evening.

This gives a variety and a sense of importance to the mid-week meeting that it has not had before. If you consider it important enough to invite the great bishops, preachers and public speakers of America to address it, your people will consider it important.

I am aware of the fact that small churches cannot scour all America to get speakers, but

they can get speakers of note from their town, and county and state.

I finance this by taking a collection every Wednesday night.

There is no reason to feel shy about this. People are glad to pay for something that is worth while, and if you let it be understood that this weekly collection goes into a fund to improve that very meeting and to provide this once-a-month outside speaker they will be glad to contribute. This also makes the mid-week meeting different. Ordinarily a collection is not taken at a Prayer Hour—but why not?

We average about \$25 a week in this collection. That makes a fund of a hundred dollars a month. One hundred dollars a month will do a great deal toward getting outside speakers. In addition to this source of income, on the night that the outside speaker appears the collection will double itself according to our experience, so you really have \$125 to \$150 a month in your Prayer Meeting collection fund.

In lieu of a speaker for this meeting I often have a religious pageant at that once-a-month meeting. My organized classes put these pageants on and they are very valuable spiritually as

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well as in other ways. They are valuable spiritually to the young people who put them on. On the night that a certain organized class puts a pageant on, that class is very likely to attend the mid-week meeting in a body through a sense of class-pride. And always many get in the habit of attending regularly in that way.

I have never yet seen a single pageant of this kind put on that the effect on the Wednesday evening audience was not profoundly and beautifully spiritual. I have stood in all parts of the audience and have watched the deep impression these religious pageants make on people. Even the most simple presentation of the life of Christ and of the scenes in the Bible impress people when these scenes are presented in tableau or in picture form.

One pageant which the Criterion Class of Linwood Boulevard Church put on was as simple as it could be. It was the story of Christ's life presented in picture form. The stage setting was simply a large frame, like a picture-frame. This setting was put on the pulpit, with the organ console directly back of the frame and a curtain between the frame and the organ. The organist played the old hymns of the

church which were appropriate to the various scenes in the Life of Christ.

For instance, when the Bethlehem scene in the manger was presented, "Silent Night" was played softly and a girl in the wings sang that old and beautiful hymn. The effect was magical.

In the Gethsemane scene, which was nothing more or less than a human reproduction of the Hofmann painting, "Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed!" was the hymn, and in the scene where Jesus is gathering little children to him "I Should Like to Have Been with Him Then" was played softly, and sung.

This simple production, which can be staged by any church, large or small, with simple costumes, and an inexpensive stage-setting, will produce one of the most spiritual atmospheres I have ever seen in a Prayer Hour.

When I inquired where my young people got the costumes I learned that most of what looked like shepherd and angel costumes were old bath robes, white dresses and simple things, which, under the colored lights, appeared to be costumes made by the most expert costumers of the city.

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The total cost of this particular production of "The Life of Christ" in pictures was twelve dollars and the collection on that night under the mellowing spiritual influence of that beautiful portrayal was close to fifty dollars.

I like to have one evening devoted to what my friend Dr. Nelson Pace calls "Poetry which Preaches." On this evening I take the poem of a great poet, like Edwin Markham's "How the Great Guest Came," "The Shoes of Happiness" or some other poem which really preaches, and give an evening to the spiritual interpretation of this poet and his poetry. You can have somebody read some of the briefer poems of this writer. You can have somebody sing some of this writer's poetry which is often put to music. You can often have the poet himself appear. Then you have the half hour for your own message from "Poetry which Preaches."

In "Pictures which Preach" you can do the same thing. You get a copy of Hofmann's Gethsemane for illustration. You put it up in your Prayer-Hour room, and focus a spotlight on it during the prayer period. Then you preach on that picture.

These once-a-month Feature Services get

many people in the habit of attending the Sanctuary Service who otherwise might not be attracted, even by such an alluring type of a modern service as I am trying to set forth in this book. I have seen hundreds of people get their start by attending one of these special once-a-month Feature Services on Wednesday evenings and become habitual attendants.

Another way to increase attendance, and make habitual attendance probable, is that "Group Night Plan" which we have worked out, and which I shall discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VIII

Group Nights at the Mid-Week Meeting

The first thing that a preacher must do to re-make the mid-week meeting is to build up morale among his church members for that meeting.

He must teach the church to hold that night sacred.

If he does not take this thing seriously he cannot expect the church to take it seriously.

It may take a little time, but I have seen such a morale developed in a church that a group would as soon think of having something else at the hour of the Prayer Meeting on Wednesday as they would think of scheduling a dance on Sunday morning.

A church is nearly always willing to coöperate with a preacher who takes this Wednesday evening meeting seriously. If he proposes to

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the various church organizations that they refrain from scheduling other meetings between the hours of 6:30 and 8:30 on Wednesday evening I believe that he will find them eager to help preserve those hours sacredly.

The first thing the minister must do in this propaganda of education is to make the church understand that this is a great spiritual hour. He must make the church constituency understand that seven days between spiritual refreshment is a long time; that the church needs the spiritual impetus which this meeting can give and that that hour is set aside for no small thing. He must make his church group feel that, in his eyes, that Wednesday night meeting is just as important, just as sacred as either of the Sunday services.

If he himself takes this hour in that serious way, if he himself prepares his sermons for this Wednesday evening meeting just as carefully as he prepares his Sunday sermons; if he himself advertises this meeting just as seriously, then he can go to the church and ask the church to refrain from scheduling other meetings at this hour.

Let there be a general slogan in the church

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life: "Nothing Else on Wednesday Evening but the Sanctuary Service."

Then come your Group-Night plans.

Every church, large and small, has in it organized classes. These will be an Adult Bible Class, a Boy Scout Group, a Criterion Class made up of young people of both sexes; a Winsome Class, made up of young married people, a Mothers' Class, made up of the young mothers of the church.

In order to interest each one of these groups of the church in the Sanctuary Service it will be helpful to have a month or two of what I call Group Nights in the Prayer Meeting. Call these Group Nights by the name of the groups which are to be special guests on the various evenings. For instance, recently, we had the Criterion Class of Linwood Boulevard give a beautiful pageant of Christ's Life in the Prayer Hour. I took this opportunity of inviting the Criterion Class as a group to attend the mid-week meeting. Fifty of them came. It was their night. I always find that following such a special Group Night many of the various groups get interested and become regular attendants at the Prayer Hour.

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I learned this lesson through the Group Nights which for years I have planned for the Sunday night services. For years I have been having International Night, Masonic Night, Odd Fellows' Night, Lion's Club Night, Rotary Night, etc. I have learned, through experience, that, from each one of these nights, when these organizations come in a body as our "Guests of Honor," many of them get into the church-going habit and become regular attendants. I have never had a Masonic Night that I have not seen, as a direct result of each of these special nights, several regular attendants and new members come into the church.

So it is with these Group Nights within the church organization. It serves to interest certain individuals who never attend the Prayer Hour in becoming regular attendants. It always works in this way. From each of these Prayer Hour Group Nights we see a few new attendants at the Prayer Service. This nucleus naturally attracts others and, before long, you will find a large proportion of these various groups attending the mid-week meeting. They will hardly know just how they got interested, but if you yourself get to talking with them and

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will trace it back you will learn that hundreds started in the first attendance at Prayer Service of their particular class.

I have not attempted to extend this Group-Night idea outside of the church organization. It is my idea that the mid-week meeting should be confined to the church membership and become in the truest sense of that phrase a "Family Night." There is no distinctive Family Night in the whole church schedule save this one on Wednesday night. In the modern church, run on efficiency lines, the Sunday services are more or less crowded with strangers and outsiders. There is no chance to get acquainted with each other within the church membership. Let us keep this mid-week hour sacred for the Family of the church.

I always ask my choir director to have his practice with his choir on Wednesday evenings. The choir has to practice one night, and it is just as easy to make it Wednesday evening as Friday evening. They usually start to practice about eight or eight-thirty, so this coming on Wednesday evening does not, in any way, take any more time. And it does serve to centralize the life of the mid-week church meeting on

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Wednesday evening. This is just an additional step towards that centralization, and it is an exceedingly important step, I can assure you.

This gives you the additional asset of the presence of the choir at the church mid-week meeting. You can have special music then without any great additional burden to your choir or to the leader. The right kind of a leader will be glad to do this. He will be willing to help and serve in any way that he can. The right kind of a choir will also feel the same way about it. Besides, there is the additional attraction of a bright, happy evening.

I give my choir something to do in the "Big Sing."

I call on individuals to "sing a verse" of a certain hymn, while the congregation joins in on the chorus.

I get four of them up and organize on the spot extemporaneous quartets. Then I ask two of them to sing a duet. They like it. There is the spice of uncertainty and informality about it. I ask those who are not usually asked to sing solos in the Sunday service to sing a verse of some old, familiar hymn alone. I give the choir something to do and make them help me in the

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singing at that mid-week meeting. This adds one additional popular value to the mid-week meeting.

In addition to asking the choir to have its weekly practice on Wednesday evening I also hold all Official Board Meetings on Wednesday. I thereby interest the members of the Official Board in this mid-week service and that in itself is an achievement. However, as a result of this system, I can honestly say that in two churches, for six years I have had at least ninety per cent of my Official Board present at the mid-week service.

I say to them: "You are busy men and I do not see any reason why I should ask you to come out two evenings, one for the Board meeting and one for the Prayer Meeting. So we will save a night for you and have the regular monthly Official Board Meeting following Prayer Service. That is the time we usually begin the Official Board Meetings anyhow."

The result is that the Official Board gets into the habit of attending the Prayer Meeting and they come regularly in a few months.

I also ask the Sunday School Board to have its regular meeting following the Prayer Hour

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on the second Wednesday of each month, and for the same reason. This naturally gets each teacher in the Sunday School interested in the mid-week Prayer Hour and this is a great asset, both for the teachers themselves and for the Prayer Service.

But most important of all is getting a church into the habit of scheduling all committee meetings for Wednesday evenings after the Prayer Service. Every active church has literally hundreds of committee meetings. If the preacher can get a morale established in a church, or a habit established that all committee meetings come on Wednesday evenings following the Prayer Hour, he has added a great asset to that mid-week service.

Personally I have not found this a difficult task. We are all gregarious animals and we like to meet with our kind.

I believe that the great secret of success in the attendance on the mid-week meeting is in a centralization of the life of the church on Wednesday evening.

Plan everything you have authority over for that night. Ask the church leaders to help you to establish this centralization in the church. A

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few months of this type of centralization will see your Prayer Hour grow up by leaps into a gathering that will, as in our case, require the main auditorium of the church for its meeting place.

In the next chapter I wish briefly to review the "Food, Faith and Fun" features of this mid-week meeting, in spite of the fact that I have already covered this particular contribution in my book, "Standing Room Only." I make no particular apologies for this rewrite because there are constantly changes and new ideas coming up in an active ministry. Each new church adds new features to an old idea. I think that my readers will find the next chapter will be necessary to complete a full-rounded discussion of the mid-week meeting of to-day.

CHAPTER IX

The "Food, Faith and Fun" Features of the Mid-Week Meeting

As I have said in a preceding chapter on a new name for the mid-week meeting, this "Food, Faith and Fun Night" has also been called "The Food, Faith and Frolic Night," "The Food, Faith and Friendship Night," and other names.

However, all of these new names encompass the real meaning of the new type of a mid-week service.

That is: They indicate in the very name itself that the evening will consist of physical food, of spiritual food and of social food.

The schedule of a "Food, Faith and Fun Night" should run about like this:

(1) Supper, 6:00 to 7:00. This is the "Food" part.

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(2) Prayer, 7:00 to 8:00. This is the "Faith" part.

(3) Play, 8:00 to 10:00. This is the "Fun" part.

The heart of such a mid-week meeting should consist of these three distinct features. They encompass the meeting.

I have had the experience of seeing the women of a church in their "Circles of Service" serve from three to five hundred people regularly, year in and year out, from six to seven, with everybody through their generous supper and up in the Prayer Room by 6:45, ready to start the meeting with fifteen or ten minutes of a preliminary "Big Sing." This was true at St. Marks in Detroit and it is now true in Linwood Boulevard Methodist Church in Kansas City, Mo.

In neither of these two large churches have I ever known a single Prayer Hour to be delayed a minute because everybody was not served and through within the hour allotted to this part of the "Food, Faith and Fun Night."

I am often asked the question: "Do you find it possible to serve large groups of people with-

in the hour and not have confusion about people straggling into the Prayer Meeting late?”

My answer is that such a thing has never happened in my ministry. The “Food” part of this schedule can be so carefully arranged that the whole thing will run like well-oiled machinery.

At St. Marks the Circle that was to serve the supper on Wednesday evening was in the kitchen early in the morning. Their menu had been published in the Bulletin the Sabbath before. Everybody knew what was coming. The women in that particular “Circle of Service” had their work planned for the day. Two women were scheduled to peel the potatoes. Two other women were assigned the task of cooking the meat. Two others each Wednesday were allotted the task of getting the dessert ready. Five or six were given the task of serving at the Cafeteria tables. The dinner was dished on one plate and ready. One woman sold tickets at the far end of the Gymnasium, and a line formed at the windows for service. As this line passed in front of the windows the plates were ready without delay, and the people carried their full plates to any table which they liked.

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The pastors do not eat on Wednesday evening. They go about from table to table greeting their members, sitting a moment at this table and that one. This gives a preacher an opportunity of meeting and greeting his people in a way that is invaluable. He can eat his dinner after the evening is over just as he does on Sunday nights, if he is a wise Shepherd of his flock and really seriously desires to meet and talk with them about the Family Table.

I have always said that this mid-week type of a meeting is simply following the Master's favorite method of getting at people. He always cured their ailments, fed their bodies and looked after their physical wants first and then preached to them and tended to their social and their spiritual needs. The immortal stories of the Loaves and Fishes, the story of the Plucking of Corn, the Wedding Feast, even that beautiful Last Supper, illustrate what I mean. It is my belief that the way the Master worked with people is the best way even in this hurried day.

The "Food, Faith and Fun" night is merely an adaptation of the Master's method of dealing with people.

It is a curious and a well-tried psychological

fact that business men find their prospective customers in a better frame of mind to talk business when they have been satisfied physically. This has led to a development of the idea of doing business in modern America over the lunch-table. Some business man who ought to know says that one-half of the business of the United States is done over the lunch-table these days.

People are the same about religion. A well-fed body is a body that is ready to sit down and enjoy spiritual things. Jesus knew that right well, and therefore he cared for their bodies, and fed their stomachs before he attempted to preach to them.

In challenging my women to their part of this service I call their attention to the fact that they are carrying out the plan of Jesus when they feed men and women; that this was Christ's plan, and that they are doing a practical and a vital thing when they are willing to provide the physical food in order that the preacher may provide the spiritual food for great crowds of people on Wednesday evenings.

It is no small task for various groups of women to keep this work up through the years;

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this menial task of cooking food, washing dishes and serving people over greasy stoves, and smelly food. I always thrill to this story of the willingness of women to service. I look back upon five years of this kind of service in St. Marks with the deepest sense of admiration for several hundred women, many of whom had servants in their own homes, who were willing to cook and wash dishes for the Lord.

In the church that I serve at the present time a chef does the work and gets what profits there are. However, I am frank to say that this takes away a vital touch of personal service which I miss greatly. I am also frank to say that the absence of women in the kitchen takes away that homey touch which I like. I am also forced to say, for the help of my preacher readers, that the presence of women in the kitchen gives a much better variety to the menu than a professional chef. I advise, by all means, when it is possible, and the women of a church care enough about the spiritual life of a church to do this service work for the mid-week meeting, to have the women of the church do it.

The profit on such a Wednesday evening supper, when it is sold for forty cents a supper,

and from four to five hundred attend regularly, is about twenty per cent, and this means a good deal of money for a Ladies' Aid Society in a year.

It is hard work for the women of a church but it is soul-satisfying service for the Master.

The “Faith” part of the “Food, Faith and Fun Night” of course is the spiritual part of the evening. In St. Marks this part consisted of the five Prayer Meetings that ran every year for four years. These meetings were graded and I shall discuss the graded features of this plan in the next chapter, because I think that it is of enough importance to devote a chapter to. It is also an absolutely original contribution which I have had the honor to make to this new mid-week meeting in the life of the church of Christ.

The “Fun,” or “The Frolic,” or the “Friendship” part of the evening can be organized in various ways.

For several years in St. Marks we had mass play. The various members of our staff organized the various groups into play. There were eight or ten rooms available for this play. There were Bowling Alleys which were always

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going in full blast and there was the big Gym Floor for Indoor Base Ball games, and indoor tennis. There were schedules and tournaments of Fats, Slims, Red-Heads, Black-Heads, Old Folks, Young Folks, and various other Class Groups. There were Spelling Bees, Big Sings and Games of every sort in this "Fun" period.

During the last two years of my ministry in St. Marks we introduced a motion picture schedule for the "Play" period of the mid-week meeting. I am frank to say that I do not believe that this succeeded as well as the mass play did. People do not get so close together in a picture play period as they do on a gym floor playing, yelling, laughing, and exercising. Since I have left St. Marks, Dr. Thomas and his staff have gone back to the old mass play periods, which is better.

In the next chapter I shall not only discuss the Graded Idea as we introduced it into the mid-week meeting but I shall also discuss the Educational features that ought to have a place in every well-organized and serious-purposed Family or Church Night meeting.

CHAPTER X

The Graded Features and the Educational Program

I have not had the honor of contributing many absolutely new church methods. I do not claim to have done so. Most of the methods which I have advocated in my books are methods which I have learned and adapted from other men.

However I do claim originality, as much as any man can claim originality for anything, in the invention of the Revolving Cross, the Prayer Cross, the Dramatic Book Sermon, the Drama Sermon, the Symphonic Sermon and the Graded Prayer Meeting.

We were forced to a Graded Prayer Meeting at St. Marks in Detroit. The Prayer Meeting plan which we had developed brought the entire family to the church supper at six o'clock. That meant that the children of all ages, as well as mother and father, were there to remain for the evening.

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The only available room outside of the auditorium was overflowing. I noticed that a third of that audience was made up of children. I knew that it was impossible for any man to give a sermon that would interest the fathers and mothers; and, at the same time, interest the children.

Then I worked out a plan for two meetings. There was to be an adult meeting and a children's meeting. After a few months it became necessary to grade these groups further and we developed four different grades: Adult, High School, Junior and Intermediate groups, following the same system of grading as the Sunday School has had in use for years.

Later we added the Primary Group, due to the fact that the younger fathers and mothers who didn't want to miss that Family Night brought their wee babies. We often had, and they still have at St. Marks, thirty and forty babies. I wanted those babies taken care of so that at that Prayer Hour they would actually get some kind of a spiritual message, so we had story-telling teachers, who were experts in this line.

This Graded Prayer Meeting has been going

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in St. Marks for four years and during the last year it has been going stronger than ever.

One evening a Detroit clergyman came to speak before my adult Prayer Group and got lost on the way coming through the building. Finally, after stopping to see two of our meetings he at last reached the group which he had been invited to address. He later said that he "had to wade through three Prayer Meetings to get to the one that he was to speak before."

Each one of these five Graded Groups had a similar program for its service. The first part of that program consisted of the "Big Sing." I have learned that singing is one thing that all ages have in common; and that children get as much joy out of lustily singing as the old folks. It was, therefore, a common and an exhilarating experience to hear all over that great church the various Graded Groups singing the old hymns.

There is a real spiritual education in the singing of the old hymns of the church. The present generation knows too little of the old hymns. One of the richest spiritual heritages that the church and the home of yesterday handed down to us was a knowledge of the old hymns. The

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present jazz and ragtime craze has robbed the children of to-day of this heritage to a great extent. Few children of to-day will ever hear the old hymns sung in their homes by their fathers and mothers as we did.

One of the most beautiful memories some of us have is the memory of standing about an old-fashioned organ singing the old hymns with mother or father pumping away and leading us. That is a beautiful twilight memory which I shall carry on into Eternity with me. The children of this day and age do not hear the old hymns sung in their homes, and they are literally bombarded by jazz everywhere else they go. Therefore, if the church does not teach them the old hymns, and teach them to sing these old hymns, they will lose this rich spiritual inheritance.

Therefore a serious part of the educational program of these five Graded Prayer Meetings was and is to teach each group the beautiful and sacred old hymns.

After this "Big Sing" in each Prayer Group the leader developed his meeting to suit himself and the needs of his auditors. The Associate Pastor, Mr. Jack Meredith, took the High

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School Group. The third group, the Juniors, was handled by the Deaconess. The fourth group, or Intermediates, by two preachers' wives; and the Primary Group by one of the women of the church who was and is an expert story-teller.

The Sunday School worker is always asking why this "Church Night" should not be turned into an Educational Evening. I have hearty sympathy with that idea and feel that an educational program ought to be adopted as a part of the midwinter schedule in this type of a Family Night. However, I think that it ought to be a part of the Prayer Hour and that it ought not to drag over into the "Fun" part of the evening.

In case there is a group of teachers who would like to have a Normal Class in Religious Education, that class could be set aside as a separate group at the time that the other meetings are going on. Indeed, I believe that this would be a good thing to do.

An expert teacher could be secured and this group turned over to that teacher as an additional group in that Wednesday evening "Faith" period. If a complication arose, and

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the teachers did not care to leave the inspiration of the Adult Prayer Meeting, it could be arranged to have this Normal Class for Sunday School teachers and parents at the hour running from 8 to 9, while the recreational program was going on in another part of the church. The two would not interfere in the least.

This grading of the Prayer Meeting gives it a unique appeal to the various groups which are reached. Children like to speak of "Our Prayer Meeting." They have a sense of pride in their own group just as a Junior Church takes pride in its group. We called the High School Prayer Meeting "The High School Club." However, it was a Prayer Meeting in the truest sense of that word. Giving that group the name that we gave it, instead of calling it a Prayer Meeting, took away some of the atmosphere of the old-time Prayer Meeting. It made the High School group less timid about attending. There were often as many as 150 in this High School Club Prayer Hour.

In the next chapter I shall discuss another essential feature of this mid-week meeting; that of advertising. I am convinced that the attitude on the part of the preacher which will as-

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sure the success of this mid-week meeting will be an attitude which makes the church at large feel that the preacher himself considers this the most important meeting in the church. They will not feel that the preacher considers this in that light if he advertises the Sunday services and does not advertise the mid-week service. Therefore it is highly important that this mid-week meeting gets its full share of publicity from some source if it is to be the type of a meeting that it ought to be.

CHAPTER XI

Advertising This Remade Mid-Week Meeting

The church must feel that you the preacher consider this a very important hour.

They will look upon it as important to the exact degree that you the preacher give it emphasis in a new way.

The old way used to be for the preacher to say on Sunday morning: "We will have the usual mid-week meeting next Wednesday at seven-thirty. I hope that a large number of people will find it possible to attend this meeting."

That was the end of the publicity that that poor mid-week meeting received. That was all the attention it got. Consequently the people of the average church did not take that meeting very seriously.

In the first place this mid-week meeting

must get a lot of attention in the Church Bulletin. I have just looked over the church bulletins in two of my churches for six years and I find that my Wednesday night meeting has an average of five separate paragraphs per Bulletin devoted to it. I quote from my most recent Bulletins to show the various ways one may approach this matter of publicity for the Prayer Hour through the Bulletin:

(1)

"DID YOU GET YOUR SOUVENIR Bulletin and Booklet of Lincoln last Wednesday evening? It was distributed to those who attended the Sanctuary Service. It had in it an original Lincoln Poem and Hymn by the Pastor, the outline of an address to be given before the De Molay Boys at the Tomb of Lincoln in Springfield. Five hundred were set aside for our Prayer Meeting and they were gone in no time."

(2)

"YOUR SANCTUARY SERVICE is attracting attention all through the church world! Has it attracted your attention as yet? Last

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Wednesday we had several visiting clergymen. They were astonished at the friendly warmth of our meeting. The George H. Doran Co., publishers, of New York City, have asked your preacher to write a book called 'REMAKING THE MID-WEEK PRAYER MEETING.' Have you visited this Sanctuary Service? It is unique, friendly, informal, spiritual, and helpful!"

(3)

"THIS IS A YOUNG PEOPLE'S CHURCH! That is the hope and the goal of the present administration. We hope that the various departments and classes in the Sunday School will follow the lead of several groups and meet with us for supper on Wednesday evenings and then attend our mid-week service. It is a pleasant hour to spend together. Seven or eight members of the Criterion Class knelt at the church altars last Sunday. The church services on Sunday and the Sanctuary Service on Wednesday evening are planned with the young people in mind and all of these services are rapidly filling up with Youth. We are happy for this spirit and this tendency."

(4)

“MR. CLARK, WHO IS THE HEAD of the campaign for a larger Brotherhood Class, said: ‘I like the way the people hang around the auditorium on Wednesday evenings and visit. That is the most hopeful sign I see about the church.’ The preachers feel that way about it also.”

(5)

“A NEW SERIES OF TALKS will start soon in the Sanctuary Service. See the themes on the Red Cards which will be issued to-day and sent out in the letters.”

I selected these five quotations—all different—about our mid-week meeting from the current issue of our Church Bulletin. This Bulletin was not purposely filled up to provide this illustration. Any preacher who cares to can read any Bulletin issued in any of my churches and he will find an average of five mentions made of the coming “mid-week service” with as much variety as I can put into that type of publicity.

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If the preacher advertises in a town or a city newspaper he must include in that Saturday space a prominent reference to his mid-week meeting. This places that meeting on an equal footing with the Sunday services.

I see to it that in every Saturday church ad the Sanctuary Service is given a prominent place and attention that makes it stand out. I get the best of results from this system.

In addition to this I advocate the buying of white space in the newspapers of Wednesday morning to advertise that Wednesday evening meeting. I would do this particularly if I were in a small town which had a "Daily." The very uniqueness of advertising the Wednesday evening service gives the town, the church, and the city a thrill. It is unusual and he who does the unusual appeals to humanity.

This space may seem to cost so much that a preacher does not dare to do it, even in a small town, but my experience has been that the preacher who advertises attracts enough additional people to his services to make that ad pay for itself and add additional funds to the church treasury.

Advertising always pays its own way if the

preacher dares to break loose from ancient traditions and do the advertising.

The third way of advertising is to send out a letter to the church on Monday morning, carefully prepared, telling the entire church membership about that Wednesday evening meeting. If the letter is sent out on Tuesday morning it will reach most of the people on Wednesday morning and they will have a fresh reminder of that Wednesday evening meeting. I believe that this is one of the most effective forms of publicity for the Wednesday evening meeting. It works miracles with us in Linwood Boulevard Methodist church and I commend the system most highly to all preachers.

The Kansas City Star recently made careful investigations of such business organizations as Beauty Shops and institutions which made their only advertising appeal to women in the Sunday paper. This was the system when Beauty Shops first came into existence. But a few of the wise managers of these Beauty Shops learned that the long haul from Sunday to Sunday needed something in between to call the attention of the city to these business institutions. So they started to advertising on Wednesday as well

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as on Sunday. Business picked up instantly and now the average Beauty Shop advertises every day.

This paper makes the appeal to preachers which I heartily endorse: that the distance in time from Sunday to Sunday needs bridging over. The spirit lags between Sunday and Sunday. That mid-week meeting is important to the spiritual welfare of people. The long drag of seven days is too much without spiritual refreshment in between along the way. The Wednesday night meeting gives this oasis in the spiritual desert of the week.

But if it is worth conducting at all it is worth doing to the utmost of one's ability. If it is worth while for two or three, or ten or fifteen people, it is worth while for two or three hundred; or for a thousand or fifteen hundred people.

If it is worth while for fifteen hundred, then the whole city ought to know about it; ought to be told about it in the most direct way possible and that is by a paid ad in the Wednesday morning paper each week.

This system is absolutely guaranteed to do two things: To pay for itself if the preacher

will have the nerve to stick to it for six months; and second, it will fill the church full of people for that mid-week service.

I have copied from several of my newspaper ads the following references to our Sanctuary Service:

(1)

THE GREAT SANCTUARY SERVICE!
WEDNESDAY NIGHT AT LINWOOD
BOULEVARD!

From 7:30 to 8:30 with a "Billy Sunday Big Sing"; that popular "Gossip Period," and the crowd of a THOUSAND FOR PRAYER MEETING."

(2)

A MID-WEEK MEETING THAT WILL
REMAKE YOUR LIFE!

Not the old-fashioned "Prayer Meeting," but something new!

A Meeting that attracts a thousand people in mid-week—why? Why?

"There's a REAL Reason" for this unusual phenomenon in church circles!

LINWOOD BOULEVARD METHOD-
IST CHURCH.

(3)

WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT? WHY DO THEY GO TO CHURCH WEDNESDAY?

ANSWER: "BECAUSE THERE IS SOMETHING DIFFERENT, UNIQUE, HELPFUL! THAT IS WHY YOU SEE THE CROWDS POURING INTO LINWOOD!"

(4)

"THE CHURCH WITH THE CROSS, THE CHIMES AND THE CROWDS!"

LINWOOD BOULEVARD METHODIST—WITH THE GREAT MID-WEEK SERVICE!

(5)

"THE LARGEST MID-WEEK PRAYER SERVICE IN AMERICA! AT LINWOOD BOULEVARD METHODIST. ONE THOUSAND AVERAGE!"

I could fill these pages up with copies of these ads which I used for the mid-week service, but these few will suffice to illustrate what I mean by giving this Sanctuary Service publicity attention.

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If nobody was impressed with this advertising except your own church people the full object of the advertising would be accomplished. In fact, as I have said repeatedly heretofore in this book, I feel that the mid-week service ought to remain essentially a Family Meeting. Then why the advertising?

Because the quickest way to gain the respect of your own church people for this meeting is for them to see it advertised in the papers. This will make your own church and your own constituency know that you yourself consider this meeting a very important matter.

The last chapter of this book, which I have purposely kept down to the minimum of space, will deal with the heart and soul of the reason for the existence of this type of a mid-week meeting.

The editor of a certain prominent weekly magazine which is not a church magazine asked me to write an article about my Prayer Meeting on the general theme, "How I Satisfy a Human Need in My Prayer Meeting." I have written that article. I was greatly pleased that a Prayer Meeting in a mid-western city had attracted the attention of an eastern magazine editor so that

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he felt it worth while to devote several pages of his publication to a strictly church institution.

I am not going to duplicate that article in the last chapter of this book, but I am going to give the philosophy which must be back of this mid-week meeting and this mid-weekly effort to make this meeting one of the most important meetings of the church.

I have left this chapter to the last of the book because it is like that famous phrase from the New Testament: "And the greatest of these is Love!"

So I might say that I consider the greatest of all church meetings the mid-week meeting. So I might say that I consider the "greatest of these" chapters in this book is the one which is to come.

CHAPTER XII

Meeting a Real Need with the Mid-Week Service

I have mentioned many methods in this book.

I have also set forth the machinery which will make such a meeting successful. But I have, finally, to say that the meeting will not be a success unless it meets a spiritual need of your church.

I am not saying that because it is the usual thing to say in such a book but because it is the truth. By the test of years I have learned that a mid-week meeting will not survive unless it meets a spiritual need of the community.

In order to meet that spiritual need of your community the first duty that devolves upon an alert preacher is that of the most careful preparation for this mid-week meeting. He must take infinite patience and care about the publicity, as I have tried to show. He must also take just as great care with his preliminary "set-

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ting up" of the program for this meeting. Nothing must be left to chance in the mechanical preparation for this hour. Every minute must be carefully scheduled.

I put as much care in on the selection of hymns as I do on my sermon. I try to make the hymns not only a unit in themselves in the meeting, but I try to make them lead up to the message of the sermon.

To that end, on one evening I will select all of the hymns of the meeting. Let us say they are all childhood hymns. I mean by that, hymns which are really written for children. It is curious how grown-ups like to sing these childhood hymns now and then. Why? Because it gets them back into the psychology of childhood and because it brings back blessed memories of childhood days: Home, the old church, the old ways; all of which are sweet to think about.

All well-edited hymn books have a section of these Hymns of Childhood, but usually they are only sung in meetings for children. But I will guarantee to any preacher that he will have the surprise of his life some Wednesday evening if he will get his grown-ups to singing these hymns.

Take that beautiful hymn, "I Would Be a Little Sunbeam," or, "When He Cometh," and watch the hearts of your adults melt into a smile and then into tears as they sing:

"When He cometh, when He cometh
To make up His jewels,
All His jewels, precious jewels,
His loved and His own.

CHORUS:

"Like the stars of the morning
His bright crown adorning
They shall shine in their beauty,
Bright gems for His crown."

Or take such a hymn as "I Think When I Read That Sweet Story" and watch the hard exteriors of your grown-ups break down in singing the beautiful, memory-laden lines such as:

"I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He called little children as lambs to His
fold,
I should like to have been with them then.

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"I wish that His hands has been placed on my
head,
That His arm had been thrown around me,
And that I might have seen His kind look when
He said,
'Let the little ones come unto Me.'

"Yet still to His footstool in prayer I may go,
And ask for a share in His love;
And if I now earnestly seek Him below
I shall see Him and hear Him above."

It seems almost ludicrous but "I'll Be a Sunbeam for Jesus" is a favorite with adults when it is clearly understood that everybody is singing these old childhood hymns at the same time, just as a unique spiritual adventure. It takes them back to childhood and anything which does that is helpful spiritually. Jesus understood that when he took a little child, put it in their midst and said, "Of such is my Kingdom," and, when He told His disciples that if they desired to inherit Eternal life they must become as little children. You can quote this beautiful scene in the introduction of this evening of the "Hymns of Childhood" and you will find that your congre-

gation will enter into such an unusual singing hour with enthusiasm; and that they will come forth from it with a profound spiritual blessing. I have never known it to fail.

On another evening you can select "Hymns About Christ." The audience soon detects the fact that you have made careful preparation for this service when they notice that even the hymns have been selected with forethought and care.

One evening I selected "Main Street Hymns." I happened to have Mr. Sinclair Lewis as my guest that evening. I talked on the theme, "Homesick for 'Main Street.'" I used the Symphonic Theme from Joyce Kilmer:

"I never knew a vagabond who really liked to
roam

All up and down the streets of the world and
never have a home."

I used the story of the Prodigal Son for my Scripture lesson; that boy who was homesick for "Main Street." I selected such hymns as: "The Old Rugged Cross," " 'Whosoever' Means Me," "Sweet Hour of Prayer," "When We All

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Get to Heaven," "There'll Be No Dark Valley," "Lead Me, Savior," "The Church in the Wildwood," and many others which suggest home. It made a beautifully impressive evening.

Some evenings I select Hymns About Nature. In fact, the entire month of May and June it is beautiful to feature these Nature Hymns. It will be surprising to the average preacher how much the hymn writers have used the symbolism of Nature to teach spiritual truths. When the warm weather comes, and the world is beautiful without, people like to sing these hymns of the out-of-doors. They are varied and many:

"Abide with Me"

"Beautiful River"

"Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd"

"Down in the Valley"

"Encamped upon the Hills of Light"

"From over Hill and Plain"

"He Hideth My Soul"

"His Mercy Flows"

"Rock of Ages"

"I Come to the Garden Alone"

"There's a Wideness in God's Mercy"

"In the Rifted Rock I'm Resting"

"I've Reached the Land of Corn and Wine"

"Lead, Kindly Light"

"There Shall Be Showers of Blessings"

"There'll Be No Dark Valley"

Then you can select a group of "Hymns About the Church," or a group under the title of "Hymns of Youth," "Hymns of Loyalty," "Hymns of Hope," "Hymns of Penitence," "Prayer Hymns," etc. You do not need to follow the divisions which are set forth in the indexed hymn books but make your own divisions to fit your thought and your need. If the day has been gloomy and your audience is depressed sing "Hymns of Dawn and Sunshine." If it is cold and wintry and the winter has been long and the people are tired of it sing "Hymns of Springtime and the Promised Land." If something has happened in your town that week with which it is possible to link up your "Big Sing" by all means do it. A spiritual story may be told in the singing of the hymns.

Another way to meet a spiritual need is to select most carefully one or two literary gems

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of poetry to read or to have read in the Prayer Hour. The best books I know to have at hand for that purpose are "Forty Thousand Quotations," "One Hundred and One Famous Poems," "The World's Great Religious Poetry," "The Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics," "High Tide," "It Can Be Done," "The Book of Mother Verse" and "Famous Single Poems." There are many others but these are the best for ministers. I use them constantly. This literary gem, brief and well-read, will do much to brighten up this mid-week meeting and it will answer a spiritual need in many souls.

At every meeting I try to read at least one prayer from some great book of prayers. There are many such. I use Bishop Quayle's "Climb to God" and "The Throne of Grace" most of the time because they are the most human and the most spiritual prayers I find in book form. Bishop Thierkiel has also made a strong editorial selection of prayers in his little "Book of Prayers." One prayer from a great soul like Bishop Quayle will remake the spiritual atmosphere of a meeting. Why not? Why not have these great men in your meet-

ing in the only way we can have them now? In most of our churches it is not possible to bring the great of the earth because they are engaged elsewhere or are in Heaven. But it is possible to have the thoughts of their hearts and that is a tremendous thing. I often wonder why so many of us neglect this great asset to our Prayer Hour Meetings. I have never tried anything that has added so much to the spiritual atmosphere of such a meeting.

I always try to keep in mind, when I am preparing my sermon for the mid-week meeting, the business man, the mother, the father, the young man or woman, out there in the world, buffeted about by competitive business methods, weary of struggle, sometimes disgusted with the mad race for orders, sales, accounts, production, transportation. I think of them as grievously needing, somewhere between Sundays, a spiritual refreshment. I think of them as needing a drink out of the Well of Everlasting Life. I think of them as needing a lift, a spiritual impetus. I think of that crowd which will attend my Sanctuary Service as a crowd of people who have had some kind

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of disappointment, some kind of sorrow, some kind of disillusionment. I know that they have. Life offers so much of that!

I try to remember that the Noonday-Lunch-Club does not give them any spiritual food, any uplift for their souls. There is social fellowship and laughter and singing, but not spiritual food. There is no place in this modern life which offers the lonely, weary man spiritual refreshment except the Church of God, and if it fails that is a great tragedy for humanity.

If this spiritual hunger which is on all souls is met; if the business man of any community finds out that, at a certain Prayer Hour, that hunger in his soul is satisfied, that need is met; that particular Sanctuary Service will not have any trouble in getting people to attend its gatherings. Folk will flock to that service because they are hungry in their hearts and there is no other place in all the modern life they live which even approximates giving them spiritual satisfaction.

It is also up to the church to satisfy the social need of those who attend this mid-week meeting. This can be done by a gathering, such

as I have indicated elsewhere in this book, following the Prayer Hour. People used to like the old-time Singing School. That institution in our American life satisfied two things: It satisfied their desire to sing, and it satisfied the social need. That was why the old-time Singing Schools were so universally popular.

The church in this Wednesday evening meeting has an opportunity, if it will seize this chance, to satisfy both of these needs of the human heart.

I say quite frankly to my Sunday congregations that I consider the Wednesday evening Prayer Meeting as the most important meeting of the week in the entire church schedule. I put it far above either the Sunday morning or the Sunday evening church service in importance to the individual member and to the church at large.

The old-time preacher used to say that the "Prayer Meeting is the spiritual barometer of the church." He was right to a certain extent. To-day that is even more true than it was then. To-day that Wednesday night meeting is absolutely the only Family Gathering we have in American life. Our home-life is shattered.

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Our church services are big, popular, crowded gatherings of the entire city. We do not get that personal contact with each other; that spirit of communion, that fraternal touch which the church of Christ had in its early beginnings; which was and is the very genius of the church. The church that loses this fraternal, family touch loses its very heartbeat. The Church Night, or the Family Night, the "Food, Faith and Fellowship Night," or "The Sanctuary Service," will restore this in all of its splendid, pristine, spiritual glory if it is worked carefully and prayerfully.

I have sent forth this book with the hope that it may help even a little to a restoration of the mid-week meeting, in a different way; a way to fit the new day; and with the hope that it may help the preacher in a practical fashion to solve this ever-present problem.

THE END

~~University of Southern California~~

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